

### The Amateur Nurse.

The only place where the amateur nurse cuts a good figure is in the pages of a sentimental novel. There she shines exceedingly, and is justly admired, for she really is a most wonderful person. As far as one can make out she never goes to bed and rarely eats. The details which mere professional nurses acquire by toilsome study and experience are an instinct with her; she has the whole business at her finger ends.

Invariably cheerful, kindly and sympathetic, she wins all hearts. Her first and greatest conquest is usually the doctor, who, of course, is young, single and handsome. (It is only in every-day life that one's family doctor is somewhat stout, and given to boasting of the exploits of his eight children.) Of course, if the patient is a young and handsome man the doctor must be old. When the crisis is safely past, the old doctor lays his hand on the amateur nurse's head and calls her his dear child, and says that he has never met her equal. He considerably dies soon after, and leaves her a thousand or two, with which to set up housekeeping along with the young man. Should her labours prove too great a strain on her fragile frame, the amateur nurse in fiction never collapses until the patient is convalescent; her final swoon being timed with great regard for dramatic effect. Also, she knows all sorts of clever dodges; there is a favourite one, beloved of her chroniclers, whereby she rescues a diphtheria patient from the very jaws of death. How she does it is not explained, but it is invariably a triumphant success, for the amateur nurse in fiction can teach the doctors a thing or two.

Alas! how different from this fascinating picture is the average untaught nurse in real life. No one has a very high opinion of her, though probably no one thinks so badly of her as she does of herself. What a horribly humiliating sensation it is to find oneself cast by fate for the rôle of nurse when one has not studied the part! There is hardly any imaginable situation that could give one such a feeling of helpless incompetence. Of course there is really no need to worry, the case is not very bad or it would be put into more capable hands, but that is what the amateur nurse seldom realises; and she expends an amount of brain fag over a mild case of influenza that would spread comfortably over a typhoid epidemic if there were any science in it.

It is of no use to count on the doctor as an ally; he is impatient of one's ignorance (no

wonder!), and freezingly scornful of one's little painfully acquired knowledge.

And the worst part of it is that it is in little, simple matters that one's ignorance is often most apparent. For instance, the varieties and uses of alcoholic drinks form no part of a schoolgirl's education, yet I remember being woefully at sea through the lack of a little knowledge therein. I had been asked to take charge of an old lady while her relations went to a concert. There was her medicine to be given, then a light supper at eight-thirty, and a nightcap of whisky at nine-thirty. "Just a little whisky, sugar, and hot water, you know," they informed me; "you will find the whisky in the sideboard."

She was a dear old lady, and we had a very charming evening in her bedroom. All went well until it was time for her "night-cap." To my horror I found decanters of all sizes and shapes in the sideboard, and for the life of me I could not tell which contained whisky. But I thought it must be nasty or it would not be given to an invalid, so decided on the most evil-smelling of the whole collection. Then as to quantity. With reckless liberality I prepared a stiff bumper and carried it upstairs, marvelling the while that people could drink, and even enjoy, such queer stuff. The old lady seemed to enjoy it, she was very cheerful and talkative after, then she slept soundly. No harm was done, but the thought still afflicts me at times that I have been guilty of making one most innocent old lady blissfully drunk.

Then there is the clinical thermometer. Everybody knows all about clinical thermometers nowadays; no home is complete without one. Therefore, when I had a spell of nursing to do once, I felt it to be my bounden duty to buy one. It cost half-a-crown, which I thought a good deal. Then I read up all I could find about the thing in various nursing books. One sentence I remember particularly, because it was printed in capitals. It was:—"The clinical thermometer cannot lie." Mine must have been a unique specimen.

My patient never seemed to have a temperature, at any rate not an exciting one. She suggested taking it at midnight. We did so, and the thermometer registered 110 deg. The patient remarked that it was a good thing it was no higher or the glass would have burst. In the morning I tried to show her what an altogether improper and unheard of thing it was to have such a temperature, but the subject did not seem to interest her so much as did her breakfast. We put the thermometer away after that. What was wrong with it I have never discovered, but the experience lessened

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